

Resources

The Children's Partnership, The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway. Free online at www.childrenspartnership.org or for \$5 by contacting 1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206, Santa Monica, CA, 90401, (310) 260-1220.

- Aftab, Parry, *A Parents' Guide To The Internet*, October, 1997. At your local library or bookstore. See also www.familyguidebook.com
- American Library Association, *The Librarian's Guide To Cyberspace For Parents & Kids*. Free online at www.ala.org/parent-spase/greatsites or by contacting ALA Public Information Office, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611, (800) 545-2433, ext. 2148
- Library of Congress, *Internet Guides, Tutorials, and Training Information*, lcweb.loc.gov/global/internet/training.html
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, *Child Safety on the Information Highway*. Available for free by writing 2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550, Arlington, VA, 22201. See also www.ncmec.org
- National PTA, www.pta.org, (312) 670-6782.
- National Urban League, www.nul.org, (212) 558-5300.
- Polly, Jean Armour, *The Internet Kids & Family Yellow Pages*, 2nd Edition, June, 1997. At your local library or bookstore. See also www.netmom.com



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tips & tools for Parents



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The Internet needs your attention

It seems that overnight there is a whole new world for kids – and for you as a parent. If your child is not “online” already, he or she may soon be joining the 10 million children who are using the Internet (*Find/SVP's 1997 American Internet User Survey*).

The good news is that the online world offers children experiences that are educational and rewarding. In addition, being able to use the Internet effectively may increase a child's school performance and future job potential.

However, this new medium also can present unsafe situations. Just as you would not allow your child to wander alone into unknown territory, you also would not want him or her to interact on the Internet without parental guidance and supervision.

To help you keep your child safe online, this brochure provides an overview of three areas of the Internet that are popular with children (email, the Web, and chat rooms). For each area, we:

- List positive benefits, as well as possible risks, for your child
- Provide a range of parenting tips that are most relevant to that area
- Explain what parental control tools can do
- This brochure also includes a resource list for additional information.

The New Medium

The Internet poses new challenges for parents because, unlike television and radio, the Internet:

- Is interactive – your child can interact with anyone else online from your home, school or library
- Allows any user, anywhere, to post any information, including materials that are inaccurate, misleading and inappropriate for children
- Provides no restrictions on advertising to children
- Is not always anonymous – even when it feels like it is

Furthermore, your child probably knows more about computers and the Internet than you do.

What parents can do

1. Learn about the Internet

If you are just starting out, see what your local library, community center, school or newspaper offers by way of introduction.

2. Get Involved

Spend time online with your child, whether at home, at the library, or at a computer center in your community. Your involvement in your child's life, including his or her online life, is the best insurance you can have of your child's safety.

3. Stay Informed

Keep yourself informed about the parental control tools that can help you keep your child safe online. This brochure includes an introduction to what currently available tools can and cannot do.

4. Become an Advocate for Kids

If you see material or practices you do or do not like, contact your Internet Service Provider (the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet) or the company that created the material. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to make sure that this growing medium develops in positive ways for kids.

email

sending & receiving electronic messages

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Keep in touch with teachers, family, friends
- Get help with homework
- Establish mentoring relationships
- Practice writing
- Receive online newsletters
- Make worldwide pen pals

Dangers/Risks

- Strangers, at times pretending to be someone else, can communicate with your child
- Harassing messages
- Unsolicited email (“spam”), usually about sites with sexually explicit material, products for sale, or moneymaking schemes

Parenting Tips

- Share your child’s email account and password
- Talk with your child about the people he or she is meeting online
- Set a rule that your child never arranges an in-person meeting without you present
- Complain to the sender of unsolicited email and to your Internet Service Provider (ISP) about unwanted email

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Route your child’s email first to your account
- Reject email from specific email addresses
- Limit email with offensive language and personal information from being sent and received

Browsing the World Wide Web

Exploring information on world-wide computer networks, usually by using a browser such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Access rich educational and cultural resources (text, sounds, pictures, and video) otherwise unavailable to most people
- Obtain up-to-the-minute information
- Improve ability to understand and evaluate information
- Stay informed by accessing your community and school Web sites
- Play fun and educational games
- Learn educational skills useful in future jobs

Dangers/Risks

- Easy-to-find sites with sexually explicit images and text
- Easy-to-find sites promoting hatred, bigotry, violence, drugs, cults, and other things not appropriate for children
- Inaccurate, misleading, and untrue information
- No restrictions on marketing products such as alcohol and tobacco to children
- Marketing that deceptively collects personal information from kids in order to sell products to them or their parents
- Requests for personal information for contests, surveys, etc., that are used in unauthorized ways
- Easy access to games with excessive violence and gender stereotypes

Parenting Tips

- Keep computer in family area to better monitor your child’s activity
- Regularly spend time online with your child to learn about his or her interests and activities
- Teach your child to end any experience online when he or she feels uncomfortable or scared by pressing the back key, logging off, and telling a trusted adult as soon as possible
- Establish an atmosphere of trust and understanding with your child by not blaming him or her for uncomfortable online experiences
- Discuss the difference between advertising and educational or entertaining content and show your child examples of each
- Show your child the difference between sources of information that are credible and those that are not
- Teach your child never to give out personal information unless he or she has your permission and you know how and by whom the information will be used
- Establish strict rules for ordering products (and then monitor credit card bills)
- “Talk back” to Internet Service Providers and content creators to let them know what you want and expect from them in keeping kids safe online

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Block access to materials (text and pictures) identified as inappropriate for kids*
- Permit access only to materials specifically approved as safe for kids*
- Allow you to specify what types of materials are appropriate for your child
- Help you monitor your child’s activity on the Internet by storing names of sites and/or snapshots of material seen by your child on the computer for you to view later
- Allow you to set different restrictions for each family member
- Limit results of an Internet search to content appropriate for kids
- Enforce time limits set by parents

**Each control tool determines whether materials are “inappropriate” or “safe for kids” differently. Make sure you ask what criteria the tool uses and how the evaluation process works; then check out the tool yourself.*

Parental Control Tools

Where Can I Find Them?

There are three primary places from which parents can obtain parental control tools with the features described in this brochure.

- 1. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP).** The best place to start is with the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet, such as American Online or Prodigy. Most offer a range of control features, often for free.
- 2. Your Local Computer or Retail Store.** Here you can buy “blocking and filtering” software, such as Cyber Patrol and CYBERSitter, that includes features similar to the ones provided by an ISP. You have to set up these products on your own computer.
- 3. Your Web Browser.** You also can use certain Web browsers, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, to enforce parental control rating systems.

Keep an eye on other parental control tools, such as “safe areas” for kids, new types of rating systems, and search engines designed to find only information that has been approved for families.

What Can Parental Control Tools Do?

Every tool includes some of the features listed inside this brochure. Decide which features are best for your family, and ask your ISP or local store which product/service meets your needs.

Chatting

Reading messages from others as they are typing them, usually in the theme-specific “chat rooms”

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Develop relationships with children and adults around the world
- Talk to kids and teens with similar interests and concerns, in rooms specifically for kids that are monitored closely by adults
- Communicate instantaneously with family, friends, teachers, community leaders, etc.

Dangers/Risks

- Offensive language and adult conversation
- Because of its interactive nature, the most likely activity online through which children will encounter people who want to harm them
- Too much time online which limits a child’s well-rounded development by taking the place of friends, schoolwork, sports and other activities

NOTE: Other activities on the Internet, including newsgroups, bulletin boards, and listserves, have benefits and risks comparable to those listed above. You should exercise similar cautions with your child in these arenas.

Parenting Tips

- Accompany your child in chat rooms until he or she learns your safety rules
- Teach your child never to give out personal information such as his or her name or address, school name or address, or anything else that is personally identifying
- Explain that people are not always who they say they are
- Set a rule that your child never arranges an in-person meeting without you present
- Limit your child to specific chat rooms or consider blocking out chat entirely

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Allow access only to monitored chat rooms or block access to all chat rooms
- Block private messages between a child and another user
- Limit your child’s ability to give out personal information

What Can They Not Do?

No parental control tool is 100% reliable. Not only do tools inadvertently allow access to some inappropriate material and block access to some valuable information, but savvy children may be able to get around the controls.

NOTE: Any mention of a product in this brochure is for example only and does not constitute an endorsement.